Provenance research is one of the main growth areas in the history of the book, shedding light on how books were used and regarded in the past.’ These are the words of Giles Mandelbrote in his introduction to the book Libraries Within the Library: The Origins of the British Library’s Printed Collections (2009). Another English book historian, Andrew Pettegree recently wrote that ‘For researchers [...] the most interesting books are those with the most wear and tear: the most heavily used, the most scribbled in, those with notes in the margin.
or at the back, and other signs of use.’ Provenance research, we may conclude, is firmly established as a field of study in the libraries and universities in the Anglo-Saxon world. The situation in The Netherlands, however, is rather different. Little research so far has been done here on the material aspects as they have been handed down to us through the ages.

Luckily, attempts are now made to improve this situation. The Department of Book and Digital Media Studies of the Leiden Faculty of Humanities in close collaboration with the Scaliger Institute has initiated a project, entitled ‘Provenance research in Leiden’. It focuses on book bindings, provenances, annotations and other physical traces of the use of books in the Leiden Special Collections, with the aim of obtaining a better understanding of material book (both manuscript and printed) culture through the ages.

For this research project, co-operation with several partners in Europe is envisaged, among them the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in München and the library of Uppsala University in Sweden. Other intended partners in the project are the Consortium of European Research Libraries (cERL) and BookNet, a network for ‘the technological study of the book and manuscript as artefact’. One of the main concerns of the project will be creating a digital infrastructure for collecting and presenting information on these aspects, as well as building a database with field descriptions and illustrations for users all over the world. Particular attention will be given to the way in which Leiden humanists, many of whose collections have ended up in the University Library and Bibliotheca Thysiana, used their books.

This special issue of Omslag presents articles which all in one way or another deal with provenance research in the Leiden Special Collections. It aims to make clear how much information there is to be found just by studying individual copies of books and manuscripts. Let’s hope it is the beginning of an exciting new project.

The puzzling provenance of the German edition of Braun and Hogenberg in the Bodel Nijenhuis collection

Martijn Storms (Curator of Maps and Atlases)

In 1572 the first volume of the Civitates Orbis Terrarum by Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg was published in Cologne. This town atlas can be seen as a counterpart of Abraham Ortelius’ Theatrum Orbis Terrarum that was first published in Antwerp two years earlier and is considered as the first modern world atlas. A copy of a German edition of the Civitates (Beschreibung und contrafactur der vornembster Stät der Welt; COLLBN Atlas 12) is part of the bequest of Johannes Tiberius Bodel Nijenhuis (1797-1872), a Leiden publisher and collector of cartographic and topographic material.

Under the Hammer

One of the first important acquisitions Bodel Nijenhuis made was at the auction of the Utrecht lawyer and archivist Petrus van Musschenbroek (1764-1823) in 1826 at S. and J. Luchtmans in Leiden. As owner-director of the Luchtmans publishing and auction house, Bodel Nijenhuis had made the catalogue of this auction himself (De Vries, 1989, p. 12-13). Former curator of maps Dirk de Vries states that two town atlases of Braun and Hogenberg came under
the hammer at that auction: an uncoloured Latin edition and a rare coloured German edition. Based on Van Musschenbroek’s and Bodel’s notes at the first two fly leaves in the German edition, De Vries concludes that Bodel Nijenhuis did not succeed in obtaining the German edition at the Van Musschenbroek auction, but that he finally acquired that copy at the auction of the Van den Brande-Versluijs library in Middelburg in 1830 (De Vries, 1998, p. 10).

Before the title page of the first binding of this German edition, two fly leaves, thinner and slightly larger in size than the rest of the atlas, are added. At the first fly leaf is a note in Van Musschenbroek’s hand that shows his interest in the history and geography of Utrecht, one of the major topics in his collection: ‘This book is printed, according to the preface, at Cologne in 1572 and it is complete, like this, very rare. The 20th plate of this volume is the plan of Utrecht, on which the Vredenburg Castle still is depicted complete. Once, I have seen an incomplete copy of this book, kept in one of the Roman churches in Utrecht and without a title, in which the same plan of Utrecht appeared, although the text of some cities were in Lower German and of others in Latin, from which I had to conclude, that this also a Lower German edition must have been. P.v.M.’

Lost and found

The second fly leaf contains notes of Bodel Nijenhuis about auction prices of several Braun and Hogenberg editions during the early 19th century. It contains also notes on the Leiden auction: ‘Bij P. v. Musschenbroek’s auctie bood de Eng. Heber op de Lat. tekst, ongekleurd, tot f 50,-, Hodges tot f 62,-; kost mij f 63,- en eigenlijk, na aftrek der 12 pct. (f 8,-) f 55,-’. From this note we can conclude that Bodel Nijenhuis bought the uncoloured Latin edition at ‘his own’ Luchtmans auction. However, at present this Latin edition cannot be found either in the Bodel Nijenhuis collection or in the auction catalogue of Bodel’s library (that wasn’t part of his bequest to Leiden University Library). Anyway, this note is not about the coloured German edition in which it is kept.

The fly leaf with the note in Van Musschenbroek’s hand is misleading. When we examine the auction catalogue of Van Musschenbroek’s library, of which an annotated copy by Bodel Nijenhuis is kept in the collection of the Maatschappij der Nederlandse Letterkunde, only one copy of Braun and Hogenberg’s town atlas is mentioned: ‘G. Braunii Civitates Orbis Terrarum, Colon. 1572. 2 vol. cum premit. fig. p.’ (map section, p. 191, lot 120). This must be the uncoloured Latin edition mentioned in Bodel’s note. At the third fly leaf, on thicker paper and with the same size as the rest of the atlas, we can read Bodel’s note on the Middelburg auction: ‘Duitse gekleurde tekst, gekocht 10 Meijs 1830 te Middelburg, Auctie der Bibl. Van den Brande-Versluijs, à f n. s. De Latijnse tekst liep ongekleurd, Oct. 1826 te Leijden, f 63,00.’

Van Musschenbroek’s note on the first fly leaf in the German edition.

Bodel’s note on the second fly leaf in the German edition.

Bodel’s note on the third fly leaf in the German edition.

Original note of Petrus van Musschenbroek in Dutch

 Dit Boek is gedrukt, blijvens ’t eynde van de Præfatie, te Ceulen in 1572 en hetselve is compleet, zoals dit, in twee Deelen, seer seldsaem. De 20ste plaet van dit Deel is de plattegrond van Utrecht, waerop het Casteel Vredenburg nog in zijn geheel algebeelt staat. Ik heb eens van dit Boek een incompleet exemplaar, berustende in een der Roomsche kerken binnen Utrecht en sonder titul, gezien, int welk dezelve platte grond van Utrecht was, dog de text van sommige stede was int Nederduitsch en van anderen int Latijn, waeruit ik men te moeten besluiten, dat hier van ook een Nederduitsche uitgaeve moet geweest zijn. P.v.M.